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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006037

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SUBJECT: ON A KNIFE'S EDGE: TURKEY'S EU ACCESSION PROCESS

REF: ANKARA 5976

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: The next two months are critical for Turkey's EU accession. The obstacles remain formidable. Should the EU and Turkey fail to arrive at a modus vivendi over Cyprus, the result could well be a de facto suspension of negotiations. With the Turks in a nationalist, "it's us against the world" mood and pre-election mode, that could easily shift to rupture. This would be bad for Turkey, Europe, the region, an eventual Cyprus settlement, and U.S.-Turkish relations. Over the next eight weeks, USG high level interlocutors will need to talk often and openly, both in Turkey and in Europe to help prevent this rupture and to preserve our own bona fides here. End summary.

12. (C) Turks have been in denial for months over the Cyprus train wreck scenario, believing matters will be papered over eventually as has happened at previous crisis points. This one is different:

--The slow pace of political reforms in Turkey and freedom of expression prosecutions appear to leave many unsure of how serious the GOT is about pursuing its European vocation.

--Many here, from the man on the street to bureaucrats in government who have long pushed for Turkey's EU membership, seem convinced failure is inevitable. No matter which legislative boulder they push up the hill, no matter how comprehensive their adoption of the Acquis, they believe in the end Europe will say no.

--The GOT upped the ante when PM Erdogan traveled to northern Cyprus, declared Turkey would not abandon it or open its ports and airports to the Greek Cypriots until the EU made good on what the Turks see as its promise to lift the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots (in reward for their April 2004 "yes" vote on the Annan Plan).

--Nationalist sentiment is running high. This results from the PKK terrorism issue, the European parliament report on Turkey, action by the French National Assembly to criminalize denial of the 1915 Armenian "genocide," and the approach of presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007. Few issues jangle nationalist nerves more than Cyprus.

--The military probably still formally supports EU accession as the present day manifestation of Ataturk's European/Western ambitions. But some fear also that EU dicta to put the military under civilian control could lead to the unraveling of Ataturk's secular society, especially at the hands of PM Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) government.

13. (C) In addition, this EU-Turkey round goes forward without recently departed British Ambassador to Turkey Sir Peter

Westmacott. At each previous crisis point, the UK and especially Westmacott were instrumental, in real time, in drawing out the crux of the problem and finding a compromise.

The new UK ambassador will lack Westmacott's contacts and experience in Turkey, and no other EU ambassador can play a comparable role.

¶4. (C) Enter the Finns. They have done an admirable job of listening and identifying a loose package of Cyprus-related elements that could allow this process to continue to bump forward. Despite the obvious benefits for Turkey, Ankara has embraced the initiative with alacrity and distaste. With skill and luck, though, the Finns may be able, at least temporarily, to satisfy both Turkish demands (easing TC isolation) and EU demands (that Turkey open ports/airports to the ROC), while kicking other Cyprus issues down the road a few years. It is significant that the Finns have implicitly linked the two, a leap many in the EU appeared reluctant to make. The issues remain thorny. If the Turks say "yes, maybe" but are not seen as being sufficiently flexible or aggressive in negotiating the details, it will count against them. Even if the Turks work effectively and the Greek Cypriots balk, it is not clear that will suffice to prevent negotiations from stalling on more than a few acquis chapters. This is a risk we need to persuade the Turks to take, no matter how hard the sell.

¶5. (C) A rupture would serve no one's interest. It would isolate Turkey from Europe and exacerbate growing nationalism here. It could remove virtually any prospect of a comprehensive Cyprus settlement anytime soon, as well as any incentive to do something constructive on Armenia. It could undermine Turkey's cooperation with us and the Europeans on Iran -- cooperation that will be critical in future years.

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It could hurt us on Iraq. Bluntly put, it risks seriously changing the Turkey equation for the Europeans and the West generally, which means us.

¶6. (C) Our role -- behind the scenes, persistently, and at high levels -- is to persuade and cajole the parties (Ankara, Brussels and key European capitals) to support and work with the Finnish package. In the absence of a fully capable UK ambassador, the Germans will be key. They will want to minimize problems for their EU presidency next year. We will also need to nudge UN U/SYG Gambari to move forward with his efforts to foster a process that could lead to renewed UN settlement talks. And when the right time comes -- when all parties have engaged but the December EU summit deadline is looming -- we need to be prepared to offer up additional practical suggestions that will help give all parties enough to make the Finnish package work. We have consistently, through many administrations, supported Turkey's EU vocation.

In the wake of PM Erdogan's October 2 meeting with President Bush, where the President pledged our support, we need to work hard to keep this on the rails.

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